

CHAPTER 4: EXISTING CONDITIONS

Fauquier County is located primarily in the Piedmont physiographic province of Virginia, and is therefore comprised of gently rolling hills that make for excellent bicycling conditions. The northwestern part of the County lies within the Blue Ridge province and is characterized by more steeply sloping terrain - conditions which also attract bicyclists who seek more challenging climbs, as well as people who enjoy hiking the Appalachian Trail. The county is bounded on its southern edge by the Rappahannock, a scenic and historic river that is surrounded by numerous archeological and historic sites.

Fauquier County's scenic farm country and historic small towns have long attracted recreational bicyclists and other tourists interested in weekend getaways, antique shopping and exploring civil war history. The natural beauty and high quality of life in Fauquier County, coupled with its proximity to the Washington DC metro area, have also made it an attractive place to settle. Fast-paced residential and commercial development accompanied this population growth, particularly on the eastern half of the county. This growth has created high volumes of motor vehicle traffic, and has raised concerns about the safety of pedestrians and bicyclists.

A number of Service District plans have directly addressed the need for better conditions for walking and bicycling, and have made this a key goal for future growth. One example is the Remington Service District Plan, which states that "movement throughout the community will be equally convenient for pedestrians, bicyclists and motorists." (Remington Service District Plan, page 4.)

Despite the County's goal of clustering development within Service District areas, low density, single use development in Fauquier County is creating a deterrent to walking and bicycling due to long travel distances between origins and destinations. Housing communities are often isolated from services, workplaces and schools, and are divided by wide arterials that are uncomfortable for walking and bicycling. Many of the existing suburban areas in the region will require retrofit to accommodate and encourage walking and bicycling, however there are opportunities to influence future developments to ensure they are designed to accommodate pedestrians and bicyclists.



Existing Off-Road Trails

Fauquier County is in the early stages of developing a network of off-road trails. One of the County's most notable trail facilities is the Warrenton Branch Greenway, which was built in 1998. This 1.5-mile

trail extends from downtown Warrenton (near the old depot) along an abandoned railroad corridor southeast to the Route 29 Bypass, where it crosses over the freeway and connects to a parking lot on Old Meetze Road. There are future plans to extend this trail south along Route 29 for approximately 0.75 miles to Lord Fairfax Community College, in conjunction with a development that is planned in that area of the County. In addition, the County hopes to extend the trail further to the south along the abandoned rail line corridor.

This extremely popular trail was supported by the Town of Warrenton and the Citizens for the Warrenton Branch, which has since changed its name to the Fauquier County Trails Coalition in order to promote the expansion of the greenway system throughout the County. This 10' wide multi-use trail includes a refurbished caboose, several historical railroad structures, and a variety of signs that provide information to the user. The Town of Warrenton is now conducting efforts to improve linkages between the trail and the Town's sidewalk network.



There are a number of park trails in the County, including trails at Rady Park and Crockett Park. These park trails are typically used by people hiking, bird watching, bicycling and rollerblading. In addition to the bridle trails in Sky Meadows State Park, people on horseback frequently use the fire roads in State forest lands, and in wildlife management areas. Equestrians in Fauquier County have expressed interest in longer treks (6 miles or more) and are interested in sharing future trails in Fauquier County that meet these conditions.

Plans are underway to provide canoe access to the Rappahannock River in the Remington area. With the growing popularity of "sit on top" kayaks, demand for canoe access to the Rappahannock River is likely to increase.

In recent years, Fauquier County has strongly encouraged residential and commercial developers to build shared use pathways and sidewalks and to dedicate them to the County for public use. This program has been successful in a number of cases, including Bealeton Station, Lee's Glen, White's Mill, Woods of Warrenton, and Warrenton Chase. The County typically negotiates proffers for trails when developers ask for a zoning change or Comprehensive Plan amendment.

In some of the newer suburban residential subdivisions, the sidewalk system is well designed for walking. A key challenge is to improve these systems by improving connectivity to destinations outside of the immediate neighborhood.

Bicycling Conditions

Bicycling conditions are extremely variable in the County, ranging from excellent conditions on rural roadways with low traffic volumes, to extremely poor conditions on congested and/or high speed roadways that extend through Warrenton, New Baltimore and other populated areas. Multi-lane intersections, freeway interchanges, and poor conditions on roadways with high traffic volumes all contribute to the perception among residents that bicycling is unsafe on major roadways in the County.

Most roadway cross sections do not include paved shoulders, therefore bicyclists must share travel lanes with motor vehicles. Travel lane widths are narrow on many of the older roads and traffic speeds are high in many areas of the County.

In rural areas of Fauquier County, increased traffic volumes and travel speeds are reducing attractiveness and safety for bicyclists on many rural roads that, just a short time ago, provided prime riding conditions. At the same time, there is a need to preserve historic stone walls that lie adjacent to some rural roads – in some cases, widening these roadways will not be possible.

In eastern Fauquier, many new collector and arterial roads are being designed with features that are not bicycle-friendly. These features included pavement and lane widths that facilitate vehicle speeds of 50 mph, when posted speeds are 35-40 mph; regular use of free flow right turn lanes; clover leave interchanges for arterial roads; and dedicated right and left turning lanes at major intersections. Edge lane striping rarely provides a usable shoulder, and many shoulders remain unpaved. There are no bike lanes in the County.

Specific hazards that bicyclists have mentioned include:

- Narrow, rural roadways with high speed traffic and a lack of paved shoulders, conditions which force bicyclists to share the lanes with motor vehicles.
- Hostility from motorists who do not respect bicyclists' legal right to share the road.
- Inadequate shoulder maintenance – debris frequently collects in the shoulder, reducing the space available for bicycling.
- Key arterials that connect cities to rural riding routes with multiple lanes and substantial traffic volumes and no bicycling facilities.
- Large intersections with multiple turning lanes creating long signal phases and wide crossings in all directions. These intersections can put bicyclists in conflict with turning vehicles. Often signal timing is inadequate to enable a bicyclist to clear the intersection, and some signals do not respond to bicyclists (actuation system does not detect the presence of a bicycle).

- Lack of off-road trails for less experienced bicyclists.
- Lack of signage and route maps to provide bicyclists with information on routes.
- The region's highways (namely Interstate 66, Route 29, Route 211 and Route 17) divide communities and create significant barriers to walking and bicycling. Highway interchanges require bicyclists to share the road with high speed traffic merging on and off highway ramps.
- Roadways that have been resurfaced with chip/seal pavements, which are loose and make it very easy for a bicyclist to slip.

There are several new bike routes that have been signed along rural roadways through and around Remington. This project was funded through VDOT's Enhancement Program. The project consists of five signed bike routes (see map on following page).

Virginia's Interstate Bike Route 1 briefly extends through the far Southeast corner of the County, along Route 611 (Sowego Road) from the Prince William County line to Route 612 (Brent Town Road), along the western edge of Quantico Marine Corps Base. This route is significant because it extends from the Virginia/North Carolina state line at Palner Springs near Occaneechee State Park to Boston, Massachusetts.



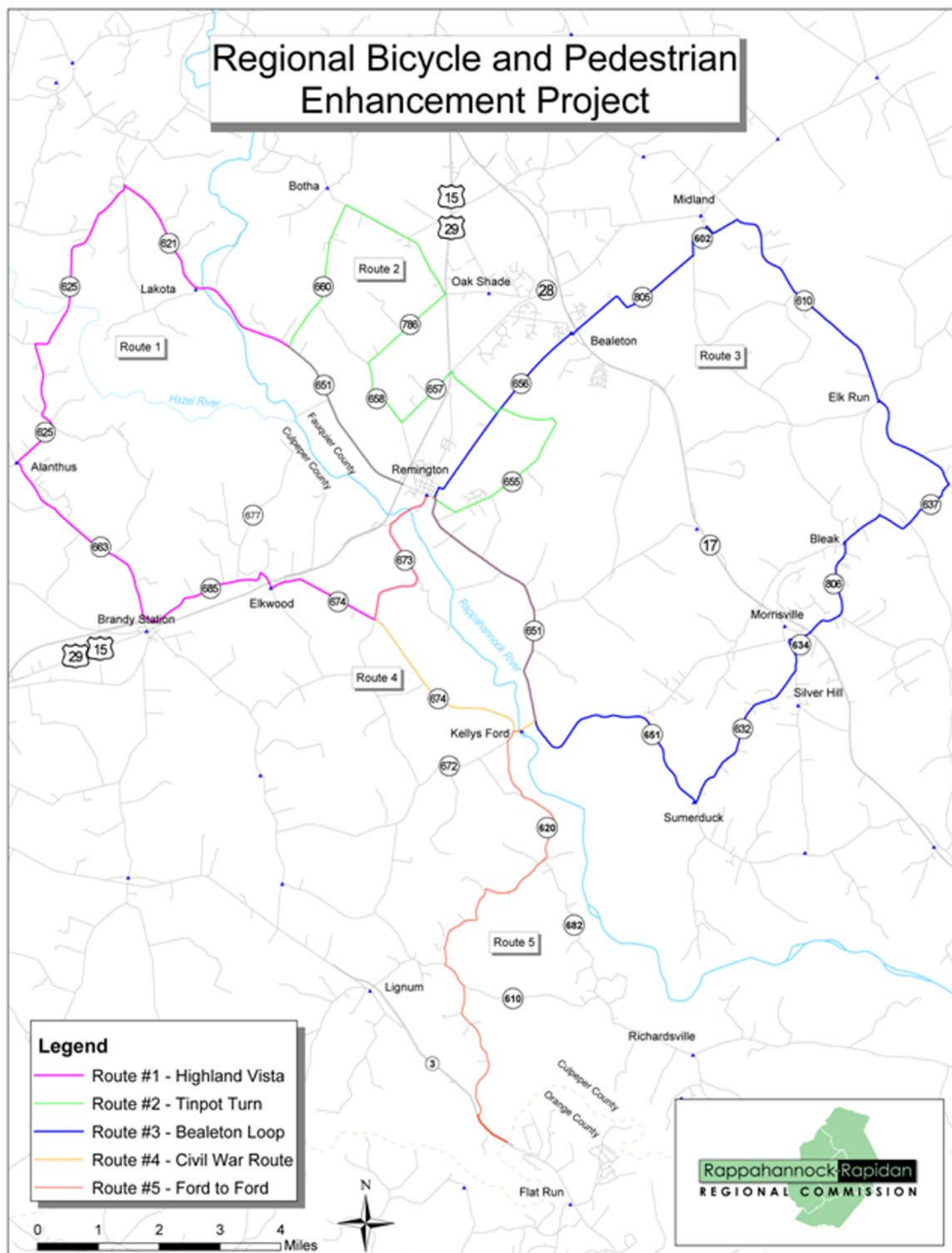
ADC's Washington DC Regional Bike Map (available commercially through ADC) shows a number of "unofficial" bike routes through the eastern side of Fauquier County. These routes have been identified by experienced bicyclists for their scenic quality and connections to other routes. This includes several loop routes north of I-66, and some routes that extend through New Baltimore and areas to the south.

Bicycle parking is lacking at most destinations, including schools, shopping centers, along traditional main streets, at parks and other public facilities such as post offices and libraries. Where bike racks are provided, they are often in short supply, hidden from view, or are not of a design that supports the frame of the bike (U-racks are preferred to "ladder style" racks).

Walking Conditions

The availability of sidewalks in the region varies widely. As a general rule, the older area of Warrenton has a good network of sidewalks, and other town centers are generally pedestrian-friendly. As is the case with many older sidewalk systems, it is not uncommon to find an intersection with one or more missing curb ramps, essential for access by wheelchair, strollers, electric scooter, etc.. In the older

Regional Bicycle and Pedestrian Enhancement Project



communities, because street surfaces have expanded over time, utility poles, signal control boxes, signs, trees and many other barriers occupy limited sidewalk space and often make passage difficult. In some areas, sidewalks have been well maintained, in others they are in need of repair.

There are many newer neighborhoods in Fauquier County that were not built with sidewalks, or where sidewalks are not continuous. In many places where sidewalks end, worn dirt paths indicate the presence of regular foot traffic. In suburbanizing areas of the County, pedestrians face the following obstacles:

- Wide and heavily-traveled roadways creating difficult pedestrian crossings
- Fast speeds on residential streets
- Lack of sidewalks on main roadways
- Sidewalks are located on only one side of some roadways, which requires pedestrians to cross the road in order to access the sidewalk, which puts them at risk.
- Highway interchange ramp crossings
- Poorly-marked crosswalks
- Americans with Disability Act deficiencies on existing sidewalks
 - Intersections without curb ramps
 - Cracked, uneven, sloping, or narrow sidewalks
 - Sidewalks with utility poles and trees in the middle of the walking area
- Lack of pedestrian push-buttons and pedestrian signals at signalized intersections
- Dead-end streets and cul-de-sacs
- Frequent driveway crossings on commercial roadways

A lack of sidewalks and pedestrian crossings in new commercial areas means that people are unable to walk between developments – even those that are located adjacent to one another. In addition, sidewalks will be needed along roadways that connect to new trails in order to enable people to access them without driving their car and parking near the entrance of the trail.

Schools that were once in isolated areas of the County are now surrounded by roads that carry heavier traffic at higher speeds. In many cases students living within a walkable distance to the school must be transported by bus because a safe walking route is not available.

Conclusion

Fauquier County has a mix of opportunities and challenges to connectivity. Progress to improve future connectivity will depend on the County's ability to overcome the barriers identified in this chapter, as well as to capitalize on the County's strengths and the growing

popularity of walking and bicycling, as well as other related outdoor activities such as horseback riding and canoeing.